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AFGHANISTAN

SNAPSHOT

Steel Master Meets His Apprentice

USAID stabilization programs have brought the opportunity for one generation to pass along skills to the next one



A young man learning the skills of the steel cutting trade from a master. Both men are employed on a USAID-funded project.

While working on a USAID-funded project, Haji Ahmad and Jalil developed a mutually beneficial business relationship that enabled both men to achieve their goals.

One of the most important tasks in life is passing a professional skill from one generation to the next. Without this, skills may eventually become a lost art. With few craftsmen in Afghanistan, the opportunities for the next generation to learn the valuable skills have decreased. However, new opportunities have recently presented themselves through one of USAID's stabilization projects in Kandahar Province.

Haji Maqbul Ahmad is one such professional trained in the steel cutting trade. "I had my own shop and my business was very successful," he said. After 30 years in business, he sold his shop and looked forward to retirement. However, he soon found himself yearning to work again. "My son didn't want me to work, but I wanted to do something useful," he added.

Another resident, Jalil, is an ambitious young man who, like many others in Afghanistan, recognizes the importance of gaining a marketable skill. Jalil also wanted to start a family, but without a job or a skill, he was unable to achieve this goal.

Both men were hired to work on a USAID-funded project to construct side ditch cement slabs. For this project, steel cutters need to ensure that the rods are straight and the proper length. The rods are then used as reinforcements for the cement slabs. Initially, Haji Ahmad was hired as a steel cutter while Jalil was hired as a laborer. However, Jalil soon took an interest in the work that Haji Ahmad was doing, and he was invited to learn the trade. Jalil said, "It's very important that I learn this skill because it will help keep me employed." As for Haji Ahmad, he has a lot of pride in his trade and appreciates the chance to pass it along. "I want young people to benefit from me, and I want them to be successful", he said.

Through USAID stabilization projects, local residents are able to improve their quality of life and earn a steady income. USAID continues to promote stability in Afghanistan's most volatile provinces by assisting local government structures to respond to community needs and address the major drivers of instability.